

AG Candidates Race Tightens

Candidates Strive to Differentiate Selves

BY CELIA COHEN

Of the Delaware Law Weekly

Carl Schnee looked like he was being squeezed.

Schnee, a Democrat running for attorney general, was the man in the middle during a candidates' debate hosted by Wilmington Councilman Norman M. Oliver on Sunday evening, June 16, on Comcast's leased-access channel 28.

Schnee had the center chair, with M. Jane Brady, the Republican incumbent, on his right, and Vivian A. Houghton, the Green Party candidate, on his left. If ever a seating arrangement reflected political reality, this was it.

Brady touted her background as a prosecutor. Houghton came on as the anti-establishment candidate. It meant Schnee was crowded politically to his right and his left, leaving him little room to make his own stand.

Oliver, the moderator, said as much in an interview afterward. "Carl Schnee's got to separate himself," he said.

The debate on "Community Crossfire: Another Point of View," a Sunday evening staple in Delaware politics, was the first joint appearance of the three candidates in what is shaping up as the liveliest statewide race for 2002.

Brady, first elected in 1994, is seeking her third term. Schnee, a Wilmington partner with Duane Morris, spent most of his career at Prickett Jones Elliott Kristol & Schnee and also served two years as the U.S. attorney for Delaware. Houghton practices in Wilmington at Houghton Holly & Gray.

It seemed odd the debate went the way that it did. The format appeared to be a setup for ganging up on Brady, who seemed likely to be targeted because she is the incumbent in a seat that rarely turns out its officeholders. The political balance also was against her. Not only is Schnee a Democrat, so is Oliver, although he says he is neutral in this race, and Houghton is an ex-Democrat now in a party even more to the left.

Instead, Brady sat calmly for most of the program — she was 15 minutes late because of another event — and let Schnee and

Houghton wrangle over the Democratic base.

Houghton in her appropriately-colored green jacket made herself a presence, almost always being the first to answer Oliver's questions and often displaying disbelief or skepticism when the other candidates were talking. Schnee looked up at the ceiling and down at his shoes, as if searching for political air wherever he could find it.

Oliver fired in limus-test questions, starting off with the death penalty.

Brady was not there at the time, but she said in an interview afterward that she supported it — as any

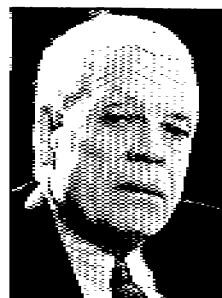
viewer likely would have known because of the high-profile cases her office has handled. Not only did prosecutors seek the death penalty for Thomas J. Capano, the disbarred lawyer convicted of murdering Anne Marie

Fahey, but they considered it for Amy S. Grossberg and Brian C. Peterson Jr., teen sweethearts in a baby-killing case.

Houghton called for a moratorium on the death penalty. Schnee wiggled between the others' views, saying, "The death penalty, when administered properly — and I think that's up to the attorney general to administer it properly — can be an appropriate part of the law."

Oliver asked about abortion rights.

Houghton responded first. "I believe in



SCHNEE



BRADY

a woman's reproductive rights. A woman has a right to choose," she said.

Schnee echoed her. "It's a woman's choice. Period," he said.

Brady tacked toward the right. "I don't believe abortion should be used as a means of sex selection or birth control. I do think in the first three months a woman should have the right to exercise that option, but I

think after that there should be restrictions placed on access to abortion, and I believe parents should be involved in the decision when children are young juveniles," she said.

In what was perhaps the most provocative exchange

of the debate, Houghton challenged her opponents' independence.

"You have banks and you have chemical companies and you have HMOs contributing to your campaigns. How can we Delawareans expect you to go and prosecute?" she said.

When Oliver asked Houghton if she was implying that the others could be swayed by political contributions,

Attorney General continues on page 4

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Attorney General

Continued from Page 3

Houghton shot back, "I'm not only implying it, I'm saying it."

Schnee called the accusation "100 percent ridiculous." Brady labeled it "grossly mistaken."

The candidates concluded with their reasons for why each deserved the voters' support.

Houghton was first again. "If you want

someone that's not afraid to straighten out the system, if you want somebody that's going to put people first and not large corporations and moneyed interests before the needs of the people, then I would like very much for you to vote for Vivian Houghton," she said.

Schnee answered in the middle. "I think I would bring mature judgment and experience to the office and be open and accountable. We will put justice first and politics last, and there's a concern that hasn't been done," he said.

Brady had the last word. "I'm the only

person in this race who's ever walked the walk — walked with a victim into court, convicted an offender," she said.

With the debate, the campaign for attorney general appeared to live up to its billing as the most spirited race on the statewide ballot.

"I thought we were going to be a little civil here and really nice, but I think we're moving into some conversation that's good," Oliver said. "I don't have a problem with taking the gloves off and letting you guys wing it a little bit." •